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ABSTRACT

Recent research has suggested that previous assumptions of organizational cohesion in schools might be misleading. That is, contrary to what is commonly believed, (1) principals may be influenced by organizational climate to a greater degree than they influence it; and (2) the external environment may have a strong impact on organizational climate changes. Results of a number of studies suggest that community demographic variables may have an impact on school climate. The study described in this paper was designed to examine characteristics of the school community and staff in relation to variables of the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire. Community demographic variables considered related to student and teacher ethnicity, teacher age and career longevity in his/her assigned school, school size and pupil costs, average income for school neighborhoods, student absence rates, and mobility rates. It was found that principally within-school demographic variables showed significant relationships with school climate. The results suggest that, except for ethnicity, external environmental variables related to the school community and to the level of funding support have a less direct relationship with school climate than has been assumed. (Author/GC)

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Relationships Between Community-Demographic Variables and Teacher Perceptions of Organizational Climate

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Relationships Between Community-Demographic Variables and Teacher Perceptions of Organizational Climate

Organizational climate in schools, or school climate, has been a topic of continuing interest to researchers, administrators, and teachers alike. The importance of school climate has been emphasized in the literature, with the attribution of high productivity and job satisfaction to a "good" climate, while a "poor" climate is seen to be one in which student alienation, job dissatisfaction, complacency, frustration, and lack of creativity exist (Clark, 1977).

Underlying most of the published work (both research and advice for developing strategies for improving school climate) are certain basic assumptions. The first assumption is that the principal's role as organizational leader is the primary determinant of school climate. The second is that the organizational cohesion within a school is such that something exists which can be measured as "organizational climate", and that this is closely related to perceived behaviors of teachers and principals. However, recent research has suggested that assumptions of organizational cohesion that have guided administrators and researchers may be misleading; that principals may be more influenced by organizational climate than they influence it; and, that the external environment may have a strong impact on organizational climate changes.

Early efforts to describe school, or organizational,climate evolved from perceptions of the interpersonal dynamics within a school as being similar to differing personalities of individuals. Halpin (1966) suggested that observations within different schools indicated that "schools differed from each other in their 'feel'." Halpin and Croft, (1962), in an exploratory study examined the impact of the perceived behavior of teachers and principals

on the organizational climate of schools. They then developed an instrument based on teachers' descriptions of their school experiences and previous research, the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ). Respondents rate items on a scale ranging from (1) "Rarely occurs," to (4) "Very frequently occurs," according to their perceptions of the way the statements apply to their school.

A number of studies have used the OCDQ as a means of examining school climate. Wiggins (1971) examined relationships between principal's behavior and school climate using the OCDQ as the instrument defining school climate, and other measurement instruments that defined three aspects of principal behavior ("interpersonal orientation, organizational orientation, and interpersonal values"). Wiggins found that, contrary to his hypothesis, organizational climate and principal behavior were not significantly related. He speculated that principals are greatly influenced by a need for internal approval of the staff and the external approval of the district. He also suggested that there was a difference between teachers' perceptions of school climate and principal's viewpoints about the organizational climate. Watkins (1968) also reported that perceptions of teachers tend to be significantly different from principals of the same schools when both groups are given the OCDQ as a measure of school climate.

A longitudinal study by Walden, Taylor and Watkins (1975) hypothesized that examination of the relationships between organizational variables and alterations in climate over time would show that schools with open climate profiles (derived from the OCDQ) would become more open and schools with closed climate profiles would become more closed. They found that their hypothesis was rejected, and speculated that intervening variables within the school-community environment, such as the impact of school desegregation and a teachers' strike, may have had an effect which could not be measured in their study.

Results of these studies would suggest that community-demographic variables may have an impact on school climate. Other theorists and researchers have suggested that the interaction of these factors should be examined. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1979) have suggested that there are two leadership styles which interact with four categories of contingency variables. Among these are "forces in the environment" and "forces in subordinates."

Hanson (1979) stated that the wide ranging environments of school settings, including inner city, suburban, high wealth, economically depressed, and public and private suggests that research focusing on these organizational situations and leadership style, such as contingency management is necessary. Researchers and administrators alike seem to assume that there are a number of variables within the community such as types of students (ethnicity and socio-economic level), funding levels, and school size which have an impact on instruction and school climate. A recent California study (Deal and Celotti, 1980), focused on two aspects of classrooms (team teaching and individualized instruction) and assumed that both would be affected by organizational patterns and characteristics of the community environment. They found that classroom instruction seems to be independent of environmental pressures.

Practitioners as well as researchers have often heard teachers talk about the school neighborhood in ways that reflect a relationship to community characteristics ---- "What can you expect from children like these? They never know where their next meal is coming from." or "We get a lot of parent pressure at this school. Everyone thinks his kid is a genius." Can these attitudes affect organizational climate? Within school factors may also have an impact on climate. Administrators express concern about having an "entrenched staff" or the contrary, a staff which has little experience. Teachers and administrators express perennial concern over funding levels. Do these factors influence school climate, or are they just a part of school "myths" without foundation?

This study is an exploratorystudy, designed to examine relationships between Community-Demographic variables and variables of the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire. It is intended to examine characteristics of the school community and characteristics of the staff at the school in relationship to selected variables of the OCDQ. It is not intended to determine cause and effect between these variables, but merely to discover whether relationships exist.

Method

Subjects

The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire was administered to 476 elementary teachers from 20 of 24 schools in one of three district areas of a decentralized urban southwestern school district in the spring of 1980. Teachers in the group included both classroom teachers (290) and certified teachers in the support staff (176) such as Title I reading teachers. Twelve administrators also responded to the questionnaire. Seventy-one men and 404 women were included in the group questioned. The age range distribution of the subjects showed the following distribution:

Age range	Number	Percent
20-29	110	22.9
30-39	155	32.3
40-49	117	24.4
50-59	90	18.8

Years of experience in education of the subjects showed quite a different distribution, with 252 subjects, or 52.5 percent falling into the 0-9 years of experience category. One hundred forty-eight subjects, or 30.8 percent indicated 10-19 years of experience in education. Only 48 subjects, or 10 percent, had 20-29 years of experience in education, while 19 subjects, or 4 percent, showed 30-plus years of experience. Years of experience at the school of the current assignment showed still amother patter of distribution with 317 subjects, or 66.0 percent, being at the school 0-4 years. Ninety-six

subjects, 20 percent, noted 5-9 years, while 60 subjects, 12.5 percent, indicated 10-19 years at the same school. Only 5 subjects, 1.0 percent, showed 20-plus years at that assignment.

These data seem to indicate that while the age range distribution is fairly even across age levels, years of experience in education do not correspond to age groups. This would seem to show interrupted service, with teachers returning after some time raising a family, or a later entry into the teaching field. Years at the school of the current assignment showed an even more dramatic shift in distribution with two-thirds of the teachers showing their service at the school to fall in the 0-4 year category.

Community-Demographic Variables

A number of variables were selected which were intended to reflect the community in which the school exists, the level of financial support given to each individual school, and interpersonal staff descriptions. School size and pupil cost variables included: Average Daily Membership (ADM); formularized per pupil special education costs; formularized per pupil Albuquerque Public Schools costs; formularized per pupil federal costs; and formularized per pupil grand total. School size ranged from 182 ADM to 526 ADM. Formularized per pupil costs grand totals ranged from $1935 to $3110.

Student ethnicity, average income approximations, absence rates and mobility rate, were variables chosen to provide some description of individual school communities. Anglo, Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian ethnic groups were represented in the school communities. Percentage of Anglo students ranged from 72.5 percent to 9.7 percent. While the Black ethnic group in New Mexico is estimated to be only 2 percent of the population, schools in our sample ranged from a high of 25.0 percent to a low of 1.1 percent. Percentage of Hispanic students ranged from 87.3 percent to 19.2 percent. Native American percentages were low, ranging from 5 percent to 1.1 percent of the student body.

Asian students included a diverse number of groups including Vietnamese, Laotian, Thai, Chinese and Japanese origins. Nine schools showed no students in the Asian ethnic group, while other schools ranged from 17.1 percent to 0.2 percent. Available data to reflect socio-economic status of a school community was difficult to obtain, but seemed to be a variable which could affect teacher perceptions of the community.

Data prepared for a 1974 report extrapolated from the 1970 census showed average income for homeowners and renters in the different school neighborhoods. A number of confounding variables have intervened in the time since that report, this was not considered accurate enought to be used as individual school data, so the income data was used to obtain an average income in the school community. This data was averaged, and schools were simply shown as above the mean area income or below the mean area income.

Absence rates and mobility rates were also chosen as variables which reflected the nature of the community. High mobility and absence rates would reflect a transient, less stable community, while low absence and mobility rates could be considered indicators of a more stable, permanent population. Absence rates ranged from 4.8 percent to 8.2 percent, while mobility rates ranged from 19.6 percent to 61.5 percent.

Demographic data used to describe the staffs of the schools included: teacher ethnicity; teacher age; years in education, and years at the school. Teacher ethnicity distribution was not as wide as student ethnicity distribution. Anglo teachers ranged from 83.3 percent to 33.3 percent, while Hispanic teachers ranged from 66.7 percent to 12.5 percent, Black, Native American, and Asian teachers were a samll minority of most faculties, if there were any on the staff at all. Eleven schools had Black teachers, with 13 percent being the highest. Two schools had Native American teachers, and two had Asian teachers.

Instrumentation

Teacher perceptions of the organizational climate of the school were examined using the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) developed by A.W. Halpin and D.B. Croft. Items in the questionnaire describe "typical behavior or conditions that occur within an elementary school organization". The OCDQ was developed from data collected from seventy-one schools in six different regions of the country, with 1,151 respondents. Descriptive statements are given, with respondents asked to indicate the frequency of occurrence, with responses rated as (1) Rarely occurs; (2) Sometimes occurs; (3) Often occurs; and (4) Very frequently occurs. The questionnaire has sixty-eight items.

Analysis of Data

Individual questionnaires of the OCDQ were scored, then mean scores were derived for each participating school. For data reduction purposes, factor analysis was performed on the OCDQ data. Four factors were derived, with Factor One variables being named "Interpersonal"; Factor Two named "Principal's Leadership Style"; Factor Three named "Instructionally Related"; and Factor Four, "Services and Supplies Related".

Items which heavily loaded on the factors were chosen for correlational analysis. Items with correlation coefficients below the .60 level were not used. Further discussion will only concern those variables which correlated at the .60 or above level with the factor. With the sample size of 20, the correlation coefficient of .60 was significantly significant at the .05 level. Pearson product moment correlations were used to test relationships between items of the four factors of the OCDQ and Communtiy-Demographic variables (see Figure 1).

Correlation coefficients were examined for significance. Significant correlation coefficients can be interpreted as an indication of the reality of the relationship. Correlation coefficients at the .01 level or above are reported (see Table I). It should be borne in mind that the relatively small sample (20) does not represent 20 individual cases, but the means of scores of a total of 476 subjects at 20 schools.

Results

Pearson product correlations indicated that 7 of the Community-Demographic variables were significant at the .01 level or above (see Table 1). Two of the significant correlations related to ethnicity. The "Percentage of Black students at school" showed a significant negative relationship with the variable "The principal schedules work for teachers". "Percentage of Anglo teachers at school" was found to have a significant negative relationship with "Teachers are informed of the results of the supervisor's visit".

There were two sets of variables which showed significant relationships that related to teacher age. "Percentage of staff aged 50-59" showed a significant positive relationship with the OCDQ variable "The principal does personal favors for teachers". "Percentage of staff 20-29 years in education" showed a significant negative relationship with "Teachers are informed of the results of the supervisor's visit".

Longevity of staff in their assigned school was the common factor in the remaining sets of variables with significant correlations. "Percentage of staff 0-4 years at school" showed a significant positive relationship with "The principal corrects teachers' mistakes". "Percentage of staff 0-4 years at school" was shown to have a significant negative relationship with "The mannerisms of teachers at this school are annoying". "Percentage of staff 5-9 years at school" was found to relate negatively with "The principal corrects teachers' mistakes". "Percentage of staff 5-9 years at school" showed a significant negative relationship with "The principal schedules work for teachers". The demographic variable "Percentage of staff 20+ years at school" showed significant negative correlations with three OCDQ variables: "Teachers work together to prepare administrative reports"; "Extra books are available for classroom use"; and, "Custodial service is always available when needed."

Discussion

In an examination of the results of the study, it can be seen that significant relationships seem to exist between some Community-Demographic variables and certain variables related to factors of the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire. It is even more striking to observe the environmental forces, represented by the Community-Demographic variables, which seemed to have no impact on variables of the four factors of the OCDQ. Only two of the ethnicity variables had significant relationships with the OCDQ variables. Furthermore, there were no significant relationships between any of the funding variables, size of school (ADM), average income of the school neighborhood, absence rate, or mobility rate.

While no substantive conclusions can be made in an exploratory study of this nature, this would seem to suggest that environmental factors related to the school community, and to the level of funding support have a less direct relationship with school climate than has generally been assumed. While these factors may have strong relationships with student achievement or other educational outcomes, it would seem that no such strong relationships exist between these environmental variables and teachers' perceptions of the organizational behavior and/or conditions within their elementary school. This may seem to suggest that the principal may have an ameliorating effect on school climate which tends to overcome the effects of environmental pressures. However, this is speculation which might lead to further research since no cause and effect can be assumed in correlational analysis.

Demographic variables which showed significant negative or positive relationships were clustered in a manner which suggests that staffing patterns (including age of teachers, number of years in education, and length of service in their assigned school) do have a relationship with teacher perceptions of organizational climate. Variables related to teacher age included that teachers

in the 50-59 age group perceived the principal as doing personal favors for them. This perception of the principal's behavior seems to contrast with the negative correlation between those 20-29 years in education (presumably in a similar age group) and the OCDQ variable "Teachers are informed of the results of the supervisor's visit".

The number of years that a staff member is at the assigned school seems to show several relationships with OCDQ variables "Teachers at a school 0-4 years" showed a significant positive relationship with "Principal corrects teachers' mistakes", while "Teachers at a school 5-9 years" showed a significant negative correlation with the same variable. It would seem that early in a teacher's tenure at a school she might perceive the principal's correcting of mistakes as helpful, while teachers at a school for a little longer period might consider this behavior as hindering rather than helping behavior. The more positive outlook of teachers with 0-4 years at a school is also shown in the relationship between that variable and the OCDQ variable "Mannerisms of teachers at this school are annoying". This was a significant negative relationship, which indicates that the higher the percentage of teachers at a school 0-4 years, the more likely they were to choose a rating at the "Rarely occurs" end of the continuum.

Length of service at a school would seem to be negatively related to some perceptions of school climate. "Teachers at school 5-9 years" related negatively to "The principal schedules work for teachers" and "Teachers at school 20+ years" showed significant negative correlations with three OCDQ variables. These were: "Teachers work together to prepare administrative reports"; "Extra books are available for classroom use"; and "Custodial service is always available when needed". It would seem that staff with longest service on a school staff have the most negative perceptions of Factor Three variables

(instructionally related) and Factor Four variables (supplies and services related).

In summary, the results of this exploratory study would seem to suggest that within the school district of this study certain community-environmental variables showed no evidence of a relationship with organizational climate variables as measured by the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire. Within school demographic variables, particularly those related to length of service within a school did show significant relationships. Further research is suggested to determine the nature and direction of these relationships.

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FIGURE 1

Community-Demographic Variables

Percentage of Anglo students
Percengage of Black students
Percentage of Hispanic students
Percentage of Native American students
Percentage of Asian students

Percentage of Anglo teachers
Percentage of Black teachers
Percentage of Hispanic teachers
Percentage of Native American teachers
Percentage of Asian teachers

Percentage of staff aged 20-29
Percentage of staff aged 30-39
Percentage of staff aged 40-49
Percentage of staff aged 50-59

Percentage of staff 0-9 years in education.
Percentage of staff 10-19 years in education
Percentage of staff 20-29 years in education
Percentage of staff 30+ years in education

Percentagd of staff 0-4 years at school
Percentage of staff 5-9 years at school
Percentage of staff 10-19 years at school
Percentage of staff 20+ years at school

Average Daily Membership of school

Per pupil funding, special education
Per pupil funding, district
Per pupil funding, federal
Per pupil funding, total

Average income for school neighborhood
(above or below average for area of district)

Mobility rate of students in school
Absence rate of students in school

OCDQ Variables

Factor One

There is considerable laughter when teachers gather informally.
The principal corrects teachers' mistakes.
The mannerisms of teachers at this school are annoying.
Teachers ask nonsensical questions in faculty meetings.

Factor Two

The principal goes out of his way to help teachers.
Teachers are informed of the results of the supervisor's visit.
Teachers leave the building as soon as possible at day's end.
The principal uses constructive criticism.
The principal helps teachers solve personal problems.
The principal does personal favors for teachers.

Factor Three

The principal schedules work for teachers.
Teachers work together to prepare administrative reports.
The principal is easy to understand.
The principal helps staff members solve minor differences.

Factor Four

Custodial service is always available when needed.
Routine duties interfere with job of teaching.
Extra books are available for classroom use.

TABLE I

PEARSON CORRELATIONS OF COMMUNITY-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES WITH FACTORED VARIABLES

OF THE

ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE DESCRIPTION QUESTIONNAIRE (OCDQ)

COMMUNITY-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	OCDQ VARIABLES								
	Factor One variable The principal corrects teachers' mistakes.	Factor One variable The mannerisms of teachers at this school are annoying.	Factor Two variable Teachers are informed of the results of the supervisor's visit.	Factor Two variable The principal does personal favors for teachers.	Factor Three variable The principal schedules work for teachers.	Factor Three variable Teachers work together to prepare administrative reports.	Factor Four variable Extra books are available for classroom use.	Factor Four variable Custodial service is always available when needed.
Percentage of Black students at school					* -0.5418			
Percentage of Anglo teachers at school			* -0.5251					
Percentage of staff aged 50-59				* 0.5761				
Percentage of staff 20-29 years in education			* -0.5527					
Percentage of staff 0-4 years at school	** 0.5557	* -0.5467						
Percentage of staff 5-9 years at school	* -0.5236				* -0.5173			
Percentage of staff 20+ years at school						** -0.9144	** -0.8890	*** -0.9353

* p = <.01
** p = <.005
*** p = <.001